

## From President Nixon's Health Message to Congress

The toughest question we face . . . is not *how much* we should spend but *how* we should spend it. It must be our goal not merely to finance a more expensive medical system but to organize a more efficient one.

There are two particularly useful ways of doing this:

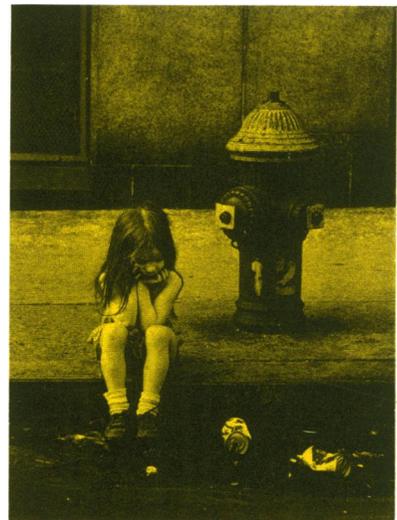
*Emphasizing health maintenance.* In most cases our present medical system operates episodically—people come to it in moments of distress—when they require its most expensive services. Yet both the system and those it serves would be better off if less expensive services could be delivered on a more regular basis.

If more of our resources were invested in preventing sickness and accidents, fewer would have to be spent on costly cures. If we gave more attention to treating illness in its early stages, then we would be less troubled by acute disease. In short, we should build a true “health” system—and not a “sickness” system alone. We should work to maintain health and not merely to restore it.

*Preserving cost consciousness.* As we determine just who should bear the various costs of health care, we should remember that only as people are aware of those costs will they be motivated to reduce them. When consumers pay virtually nothing for services and when, at the same time, those who provide services know that all *their* costs will also be met, then neither the consumer nor the provider has an incentive to use the system efficiently. When that happens, unnecessary demand can multiply, scarce resources can be squandered, and the shortage of services can become even more acute.

Those who are hurt the most by such developments are often those whose medical needs are most pressing. While costs should never be a barrier to providing needed care, it is important that we preserve some element of cost consciousness within our medical system.

Cover—Inner city child. Report on the nutritional status of more than 21,000 Baltimore children begins on page 302. Photo by Wallowitch.



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